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DE RUEHRB #1861 3531254
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 191254Z DEC 07 ZDK
FM AMEMBASSY RABAT
TO RUEHAS/AMEMBASSY ALGIERS PRIORITY 4616
RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7910
INFO RUEHCL/AMCONSUL CASABLANCA 3766

C O N F I D E N T I A L RABAT 001861

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NEA/MAG

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/31/2018

TAGS: AG MO WI PHUM

SUBJECT: WESTERN SAHARA CBM UPDATE.

Classified By: Classified by Political Counselor, Craig Karp for reason
s 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (U) UNHCR Sahara program Chief Mazen Abu Shenab briefed the Rabat diplomatic community December 12 on the HCR Confidence Building Measures for Western Sahara and the refugees. Mazen said in CPY 07 HCR had received \$2.4 million in pledges for a \$3.4 million program, but UNHCR covered the shortfall with central funds.

¶2. (SBU) The CBM program had several components: family visits, telephone communications, mail exchange, seminars and a related information outreach program. Only the flight exchanges of Sahrawis from the Morocco controlled territory with those from the camps were fully operative. The telephone centers were up, but not fully implemented. The mail had not worked out, but the exchange visitors frequently carry mail for/to both sides. (We keep urging them to use private delivery services like DHL)

¶3. (C) UNHCR was working on the CBM budget for 08. This would include increased funding for the jewel of the program, the humanitarian exchanges, roughly at the same level. They were working on road crossings, which would mean 120 persons at a time rather than the current 25 per flight, at half the weekly cost once certain capital expenses were absorbed. Algeria had rejected using the most direct route from Tindouf via Mahbes to Smara and was proposing indirect routes (such as via Tifarity) that would involve the POLISARIO in the transfers, which the Moroccans had rejected. Mazen said he was pursuing various compromises and had been granted a meeting with General Benanni, the head of the Moroccan Army to discuss this, which he interpreted as a good sign.

¶4. (SBU) If the road exchanges could not get underway, HCR could at least double the amount of air exchanges. The flights cost \$7000 each. Mazen urged the donors to be generous and fund the appeal, or the exchanges might have to stop. Countries present urged HCR to present its request as soon as possible. Polcouns noted that last year's request was presented to donors only in April, which made donation difficult. Mazen praised the USG for being the first and largest donor and urged others to follow its example.

¶5. (SBU) In discussing the HCR information campaign, he reported that local Laayoune TV is viewable in Tindouf, and Laayoune radio is receivable so the people in the camps, so they know the Moroccan position. Also, Polisario radio is able to be picked up in the Moroccan-administered territory. The refugees in Tindouf also watch Spanish television, as do some in the territory.

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Jackson